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Oakengates Urban District.

19103

Area (exclusive of area
covered by water) - 2327 acres.

Population (1901) 10,906.

No. of inhabited houses - 2187.

Average No. of persons per house 4.9.





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Gentlemen,

I beg to present my **SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT** upon the vital statistics, sanitary administration and condition of your District for the twelve months ending December 31st last.

As regards the various matters dealt with, I would remind you that inasmuch as a moiety of my salary, is repaid by the County Council out of the exchequer contribution fund, I am required by the Local Government Board to send a copy of this report to each of these authorities.

In a memorandum issued by the Local Government Board, the subjects with which this report should deal are tabulated, and it is stated, that, as these reports are intended for their information as well as your's, matters which may seem too well known to you to be included must not be left out if they serve to complete the information desired by them. For this reason, various matters which may appear to you to be merely a repetition of parts of former reports, or of subjects, the immediate importance of which has gone by, are necessarily included.

The subjects specifically named in the memorandum referred to, cover a good deal of ground, and the Board have also enlarged the tables of statistics they require appending to this report.

I have dealt with these various subjects in much the same order (as far as they are applicable to this District) as they are given in that memorandum.

- (1) General Character of the District,
- (2) Vital Statistics,
- (3) Infectious Disease Incidence
- (4) House Accommodation,
- (5) Drainage and Scavenage,
- (6) Water Supply,
- (7) Factories and Workshops,
- (8) Nuisances

(1)

General Characters :—

The district was formed in the early part of 1898 by order under the County Council and included parts of three rural districts—Wellington, Shifnal and Newport. It had been found that there was no real possibility of efficiently administering the area so long as it remained under so many different authorities, and the concentration of population, water supply, sewage and refuse disposal and housing were such as called for energetic and comprehensive treatment under urban powers.

As now constituted it covers an area of some 2327 acres and includes several more densely populated localities with some open country with scattered dwellings.

The ground surface varies considerably, the portion to the North and West being part of the Shropshire plain overlying the bunter beds and covered with drift, the elevation sloping from about 200 O.D. in the North to nearly 400 towards the South East where the Coal measures rise up and gradients rapidly increase to nearly 600 O.D. It is the centre of an important coal and iron industry.

The district thus includes a large number of mines both exhausted and actively working, coal and iron stone being raised, and a number of ironworks and engineering shops. There are a few good houses and a large number of cottages more or less irregularly distributed and of low rateable value.

From a Sanitary point of view the outstanding features are the lack of a pure and abundant supply of water and means for draining the liquid filth.

(2)

Vital Statistics.

I have estimated the population for 1903 at 11,000.

The births numbered 414 of which 211 were boys and 203 girls which is very near the average proportion. The birth rate is 37.3 as compared with 35.2 in 1902, and is a further increase on previous figures, as will be seen in table 1 at the end of this report. It is well above the average for England and Wales as is to be expected in a population containing a large proportion of people at a child bearing age.

The deaths registered in the district amounted to 187 but 8 more have to be added being deaths of residents occurring outside the district. The corrected number is thus 195 which gives a death rate of 17.7 the highest figure but one since your district was formed. The deathrates for these six years are :—

1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903
17.3	18.4	15.7	15.3	15.1	17.7

Such a result must be regarded as disappointing. The climatic conditions of the year can scarcely be regarded as an important factor, for wet years are usually attended by lessened mortality figures, and so far as bronchitis and pneumonia may be regarded as an index of unfavourable weather there were only 2/3rds of the number of deaths from these affections as compared with 1902. Three items stand out prominently in the past year's morality list—Cancer, Heart Disease and infantile morality. There were 14 deaths from Cancer, 21 from Heart Disease and 55 from infantile ailments. Each of the two former items is much in excess of any of your previous records, but a high infantile deathrate is, unfortunately, not unknown in your district.

As regards cancer it is regrettable that, though much time has been spent in trying to elucidate its cause and much promise is shown; so far, from the Sanitarian's point of view, it is still beyond his powers of defence. The mortality in your district from cancer since it was formed has been as follows :—

	1898	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03
No. of deaths.	8	12	6	12	7	14

which for a district containing a large proportion of younger people is high.

Heart disease is comparatively common in a district such as your's where so many people engage in heavy physical labour and are subject to extremes of temperature and method of living.

By far the most important of these three causes from our point of view is the infantile mortality which is an unfortunate feature in the records of the district. The sacrifice of infants is a matter which needs earnest attention, for in a large proportion of the number the cause is avoidable. The following table gives the chief causes of death amongst infants for the last year.

Epidemic Disease.	Tubercular Disease	Bronchitis & Pneumonia.	Premature Birth.	Faulty Nutrition.	Other causes.
3	2	12	10	14	14

From which it will be seen that faulty nutrition and infective disease cause 19 deaths, that a dozen died from chest affections (some of whom might have been saved) and that in ten cases premature birth was the cause.

There were few deaths from infectious disease, though Diptheria claimed six children under five years of age. Neither Measles, Scarlet Fever nor Whooping Cough caused any deaths and there were only two from epidemic diarrhoea. The Zymotic deathrate being thus only 0.9.

Phthisis accounted for seven deaths—five of them heads of families—and there were ten other deaths due to tuberculosis in parts of the body other than the lungs. Though Tuberculosis is not so common in your district as in manufacturing towns it should not be forgotten that it is a preventable disease.

A general consideration of the figures relating to births and deaths shows that whilst the births provide a considerable annual addition to the population there is a heavy toll by death, and that in a large number of instances this toll is taken at an earlier age than should be the case and through causes that are really preventable. Whether local authorities be fully alive to their responsibilities or not it is a regrettable fact that our people as a class are, in matters relating to public health, not only densely ignorant but even indifferent.

Of all the matters relating to the health of the community, and to the physical welfare of the coming generation there is none which can in my opinion secure such permanent and far reaching results as the education of our children in the elements of hygiene.

I believe it to be practicable to so grade this education that the children may from an early stage of their school career gradually become imbued with such instincts as will later on make them intolerant of dirt, foul air, miserable dwellings, unsuitable food and alcoholic excess, and a number of the other insanitary features which tend to shorten life and bring sickness and suffering amongst them. It is impossible to do much towards educating our adults. With the children who are to constitute the next generation rests the responsibility of ensuring a permanent and general improvement of the public health. I would strongly commend this subject to our County Council, who now have control of Elementary Education as being one of the most important matters with which they can concern themselves.

Infectious Disease.

The past year was somewhat less favoured in the number of infectious disease outbreaks than its predecessor, though unmarked by anything approaching a serious epidemic.

Of notifiable disease there were 38 cases almost all of them being single cases not followed by others in the same house.

SCARLET FEVER :—There were eight patients distributed in seven houses in various parts of the district and through the year. They were mild attacks and several of them were not well defined. They were sporadic cases showing no origin.

DIPHTHERIA presents a more formidable record. There were sixteen persons in 16 houses attacked, and in not one instance was another inmate of any of these houses known to be infected though in the great majority of them there were others, presumably susceptible, and who in a number of the cases associated more or less freely with the patient.

I do not remember ever to have had such an experience ; that the disease was not excessively mild is shown both by a fatal ending in six of them and in some of the others tracheotomy was necessary.

Nearly all the sufferers were young children, ten of them under six years of age. In the first quarter of the year there were four cases, in the third quarter three and in the last quarter of the year, seven.

There was practically nothing in common between them. School incidence was almost completely negatived, half of the patients being below school age, and several above it, whilst the local distribution corroborated this view. Inquiry too failed to elicit evidence of any unusual amount of "sore throat" amongst those in the localities. I am inclined rather to associate them with the imperfect method of Scavenage. Whether all the cases were due to the diphtheria bacillus or not, is not known, but I regard the ashpit system in vogue in Oakengates as a constant danger to the health of the community, and should be glad to see the large "dumping grounds" so common in number and so capacious in size abolished, and covered receptacles or boxes provided, which could be frequently emptied. In this way the accumulation of putre-

fying matter in the vicinity of houses and places where children play would be prevented and the chances of such matter, becoming dried and diffused in the air and inhaled, would be greatly reduced. The patients who died were aged as follows—three at four years, and one each at two years, one year, seven months.

TYPHOID FEVER was notified on nine occasions. Eight dwellings were invaded, there being thus only one second case in the same house. How many of these cases were really typhoid I am not able to suggest, as there is scarcely any use made of the bacteriological facilities offered for confirming these cases. It seems certain that there are other microbes besides the typhoid though of a less serious nature and seldom fatal. There is reason for believing too that these microbes are present in polluted ground and, like the Microbes associated with sore throat, may be carried about by the air (or even by flies) and contaminate food etc. Certainly there is no lack of opportunity in your district for such a process to happen. From what information could be obtained in these cases I believe that they were mostly of this character. They were distributed through the district and were quite unconnected with water supply or milk, or even each other. They all occurred however during the period June to October when the temperature of the ground is most favourable for microbic development. None of the patients died, and for the most part the attacks were slight. The provision of sanitary pails for typhoid cases does not appear to be made use of owing to the inadequacy of the staff and there is rarely accommodation on the premises for effectually destroying the infected excreta (it should not be forgotten that these microbes are present in the urine of the patient).

A few unimportant cases of Erysipelas occurred.

Non-notifiable disease was much less common than in some previous years. A few cases of chickenpox, measles and skin disease came to my knowledge.

Outbreaks of infectious disease are visited and inquired into, but owing apparently to the large amount of work thrown on your Inspector there is sometimes too long a period between the date of notification and his first visit. For the same reason very little use is made of the spray disinfectant. You are still without means of disinfecting such articles as bedding and outer garments. I would remind you of the remarks I have made in previous annuals upon the subject of disinfection and isolation.

I am glad to be able to record a clean sheet as regards Small Pox, but I do not regard the accommodation you have as being, in its present condition at all adequate

(4.)

Housing Accommodation.

I have nothing to add to what I have said in previous reports. - There is undoubtedly a number of houses which are not really fit for human habitation yet because of the lack of better houses at a low rental you are faced with a serious difficulty in attempting to deal with them. There is also an amount of overcrowding in which in many cases it is difficult to obtain evidence sufficiently precise to warrant legal proceedings, and even if such were carried out there would be the same difficulty of finding other accommodation.

I would remind you that last year a new act was passed which extended the period for repayment of loans borrowed by District Councils for the purchase of land and erection of dwellings for the working classes. In this way it is now possible for a district to provide such cottages at a less annual charge than has been hitherto possible, and I would commend this matter for your consideration.

During the year a large number of houses were submitted to a house to house inspection by the assistant to the Inspector, and a number of informal notices served, followed in a proportion of them by formal notices. These related chiefly to such matters as defective privies, or drains, want of troughing and overcrowding.

A number of new houses were built during the year which may have some good effect upon the amount of overcrowding—but it is scarcely possible for private persons to build houses at the rental most called for, so as to be remunerative.

Byelaws regulating new streets and buildings are in force.

(5.)

Drainage and Scavenage.

During the year another stage in the proceedings towards the realisation of a comprehensive Sewerage for the district was reached, and a commencement has been made with the scheme approved by the Local Government Board. The contract has been let and the work started. No doubt there will be many difficulties but it is hoped that the work may be steadily carried to an early conclusion.

A number of improvements have been made here and there in the existing sewers putting in additional lengths where urgently called for.

Some repairs have also been effected in a number of house drains.

Until the general scheme is, however, much further advanced such work must, necessarily, be comparatively trifling in amount.

The number of pan closets still increases. They are certainly preferable to the old fashioned privy and in the absence of water must be tolerated.

The work of scavenging has been pursued during the year on the same lines as previously. When previes and ashpits are full—the period varying with the capacity, “a requisition” is sent in and the work performed as soon as can be arranged. The staff appear to have been able to deal with these requisitions and not to have allowed back numbers to accumulate. I have frequently referred to the large size and unsuitable position of many of the privy pits, but now that Sewerage and water appear to be within the limits of practical politics they are probably better left as they are for the present.

I have already dealt with the subject of house refuse. Something should certainly be done to put this on a better footing.

(6.)

Water Supply.

The Scheme formulated by the County Council to which I referred in my last Annual has been under the consideration of the various districts concerned. I am pleased to be able to record the approval and support extended by you and Dawley. A bill is now to be introduced into Parliament to put this scheme into practice and I trust that such opposition as is at present threatened may either be smoothed over by mutual arrangement or, if sustained, not allowed to interfere with the passing of the bill on its present lines. I am convinced that the scheme put forward in this bill is as regards your district much the best that no substantial improvement appears possible and that it will provide for a want, the extent and vital importance of which can only be fully realised by those having a thorough knowledge of this important area. Good water which should be supplied in abundance is absolutely wanting in the case of many blocks of houses and is consequently carried in small quantities from sources (sometimes themselves not above suspicion) being obtained by permission or even theft.

(7.)

Workshops &c.

A register of these places is kept, but it is not fully entered up, nor is the routine work developed owing apparently to the Inspector having too much work on hand. The subject is an important one and demands a good deal of extra work. The local Authority is now responsible for the Sanitary condition of all workshops and workplaces and there are a good number of them within the district.

The licensing of slaughterhouses needs revision. This should be an annual procedure and before each renewal the places should be reported on and considered by you. Several of them are defective.

There are eleven bakehouses in the district, for the most part in a satisfactory state.

Another important group of places subject to inspection is that of cowsheds and dairies, but these too have had to give place to other work.

(8.)

Nuisances.

There has, of course, been a good deal of work done in getting a variety of nuisances abated. In most instances an informal notice sufficed, but a number of formal ones were called for. Some of the nuisances coming under notice, arising from want of water or absence of sewers, could only be left, or temporarily dealt with. One nuisance, a Knacker's Yard, to which I specifically referred in my last Annual, remained in its former condition throughout the year, though I had certified it as a nuisance 18 months ago.

General Remarks.

In accordance with a former suggestion of mine you sanctioned the appointment of a kind of assistant to the Sanitary Inspector. The Local Government Board, however, declined to approve of this arrangement, and made an independent inquiry. I understand that they eventually left this arrangement over till next summer when a rearrangement is to be considered. In the meantime the assistant has left, and the Inspector again has all the work thrown on him.

I have made the usual visits and inspections during the year, and advised you from time to time on various matters, and beg to thank you for the courtesy you extended to me during my prolonged illness.

I append the usual tables,

Your obedient servant,

E. T. WHITAKER



Sanitary Inspector's Report, 1903.

Infectious Disease	Cases enquired into	...	...	39
" "	Houses disinfected	...	...	39
Houses ...	No. erected	...	...	38
" ...	Made fit for habitation	...	...	40
" ...	Closed as unfit	...	...	—
Overcrowding	Cases abated	...	...	5
House drains	Laid or relaid	...	...	43
" "	Trapped	...	...	43
" "	Ventilated	...	...	40
" "	Defective rectified	...	...	9
Water Closets	New ones	...	...	—
" "	Repaired	...	...	—
Privies & Ashpits	New ones	...	...	49
" "	Converted to W.C.'s	...	...	—
" "	" Pan Closets	...	...	30
Scavenging	Privies & Ashpits emptied	...	...	3187
" " ...	Loads of Ashes removed	...	...	5574
" " ...	" Night Soil "	...	...	1733
" " ...	Pan closets emptied once a week	...	...	79
" " ...	" " " twice "	...	...	9
" " ...	" " " 3 times "	...	...	67
" " ...	Total number of pans emptied and disinfected	...	...	15,396
Offensive Trades	Under observation	...	...	1
" "	Improperly conducted	...	...	1
Slaughter Houses	Registered and Licensed	...	...	7
Dairies & Cowsheds	Persons registered	...	...	30
" "	Places in use	...	...	27
Animals kept as a nuisance	Cases dealt with	...	...	5
Accumulations of offensive refuse	Removals	...	...	2
Legal proceedings	Taken and result	...	...	—
Clerical work	Official letters received	...	...	2191
	" " written	...	...	641
	" Notices served	...	...	72
Factory & Workshop } Act. 1901 }	Person registered under	...	...	51
Reports to Sanitary Committee	Presented	...	...	12

TABLE 1.
Vital Statistics of Whole District during 1903 and previous years.

Year.	Population estimated to Middle of each Year.	Births.		TOTAL DEATHS REGISTERED IN THE DISTRICT.				Deaths of Residents registered in public Institutions beyond District.	NETT DEATHS AT ALL AGES BELONGING TO DISTRICT.	
		Number	* Rate	UNDER ONE YEAR OF AGE.		AT ALL AGES.			Number.	* Rate
				Number.	Rate per 1,000 Births registered	Number.	* Rate			
1898 +	10,838	308	27.4	40 +	129	135	6	141	17.3	
1899	10,861	341	31.3	62	181	195	2	197	18.1	
1900	10,883	377	34.6	51	135	163	7	170	15.6	
1901	10,906	341	31.2	37	108	159	8	167	15.3	
1902	10,930	385	35.2	40	103	159	7	166	15.1	
1903	11,000	414	37.3	55	132	187	8	195	17.7	

* Rates in Columns 4, 8, and 13 calculated per 1,000 of estimated population,

† For 9 months only. From formation of district.

TABLE 3.

Cases of Infectious Disease notified during the Year 1903.

NOTIFIABLE DISEASE.	CASES NOTIFIED IN WHOLE DISTRICT.						TOTAL CASES NOTIFIED IN EACH LOCALITY.	
	At all Ages.	At Ages—Years.						
		Under 1.	1 to 5.	5 to 15	15 to 25	25 to 65			65 and upwards.
Small Pox ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Cholera ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Diphtheria ..	16	1	7	4	1	3	..	
Membranous Croup ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Erysipelas ..	5	1	1	..	2	1	1	
Scarlet Fever ..	8	..	2	5	..	..	..
Typhus Fever ..	..	..	..	5	1	2	..	
Enteric Fever ..	9	..	1	..	..	..	..
Relapsing Fever..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Continued Fever	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Puerperal Fever..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Plague ..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Totals ..	38	2	11	14	2	8	1	

Isolation Hospital—None in District. Small Pox Shed outside.

TABLE 4.

Causes of, and Ages at Death during Year 1903.

Causes of Death	Deaths in or belonging to whole District at subjoined Ages.							Total Deaths in Public Institutions in the District.
	All ages.	Under 1	1 and under 5	5 and under 15	15 and under 25	25 and under 65	65 and upwards.	
Diphtheria and membranous croup	6	1	5					
Epidemic influenza	2					1	1	
Diarrhoea	2	2						
Enteritis	4	2	2					
Other septic diseases	3					3		
Phthisis	7		1	1		5		
Other tubercular diseases	10	2	3	1		4		
Cancer, malignant disease	14					9	5	
Bronchitis	13	6	2			3	2	
Pneumonia	11	6	2			3		
Alcoholism								
Cirrhosis of liver	1					1		
Premature birth	10	10						
Diseases and accidents of parturition	2				1	1		
Heart diseases	21			1	2	10	8	
Accidents	5				1	4		
Suicides	1					1		
All other causes	83	26	2	2	1	20	31	
All causes	195	55	17	6	5	64	47	